

Meeting Paper For West Coast *Tai Poutini* Conservation Board

TITLE OF PAPER CONSERVATOR'S REPORT

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SUBJECT: Conservator's Report for the Board for period ending

DATE: 21 January 2011

SUMMARY:

This report provides information on activities throughout the Conservancy since the 24 September 2010 meeting of the West Coast *Tai Poutini* Conservation Board.

ACTIVITIES:

Visitor Management

Buller Kawatiri Area

The team worked hard to get our front country sites looking good for the Christmas holiday period. It is a time when we have traditionally seen kiwi domestic visitors travel as well as show their local gems to friends and family, so it was good to have our major sites look good.

However, between Christmas and New Years, some of that work was undone when a weather bomb with heavy rains caused some damage to many of our sites. The Pororari River track in Punakaiki, through to the Heaphy Track in the north were damaged. We had bridge damage in the Lewis Valley on the Great Walk, while the Honeycomb Hill Caves bridge in the Oparara Basin was washed clean away and pieces of it have been found several days later as far away as a farmers paddock near Karamea

In the meantime, the Denniston site is nearing completion. All the interpretation has now been installed and really does provide for a high class heritage appreciation experience. People comment on how good the interpretation sits in the landscape and how 'fresh' it looks.

The underground tourist mine in Banbury is now the final piece of work that is attracting all our attention and staff resources to get completed. The underground interpretation contractor is now well on the way in installing all the equipment and early test runs have shown it is going to be quite a visitor experience.

Two new suspension bridges in Paparoa National Park are now completed. One spans the Punakaiki River, the other the Pororari River. This means that both the Pororari-Punakaiki loop track and a large section of the Inland Pack Track are now all weather access. This additional recreational activity is really valued by the many visitors to Punakaiki that are looking for something over and above the shorter Dolomite Walk walkway.

Greymouth Mawheranui Area

Storm damage has occurred on a high number of sites. The majority of damage is a result of slips on tracks and roads. There was no major damage to structures. 60% of problems have been resolved; the other 40% will be completed within the annual work programme.

There has been an emphasis on front country work leading into summer, with good feedback from visitors. Campgrounds have been popular outside of extreme weather. Our staff have reported more use on Murray Creek track by mountain bikers, post our winter upgrade of track.

The new Brunner Mine Site toilets are complete, including landscaping. Although it was a difficult site to install a toilet the final product looks very appropriate for the historic site.

Kirwan's Track near Reefton has a newly developed car park. New fences and a better road surface have been installed to counter stock damage and drainage issues.

The community of Ataura / Moonlight have encouraged DOC to retain and refurbish the Moonlight Bailey Bridge. Using community contacts and their support a plan has been developed to complete this work in autumn. Currently the bridge is closed.

Marketing is being developed for the Goldfields Journey in conjunction with the community. There are new learnings for DOC in understanding the promotional side of its business. However, there are very good opportunities if we can design and implement this correctly.

Hokitika Area

The back country team completed track work at Otehake in the Taramakau.

Storm damage (major slips) reports on our back country tracks are starting to flow in from trampers. The worst hit areas appear to be in the Taramakau, Taipo (Seven Mile) Arahura and Styx tracks. We have managed to temporarily open the track in the Styx and plan to work on the other damaged sites in February.

The building team have completed a new wooden bridge over a deep gully on the Ross Water Race Walkway. The new structure replaces the steep hazardous steps.

A new bridge was built on the Kaniere Water Race Walkway. The new design provides a much improved access for mountain bikes on this popular multi use track.

New interpretation panels have been installed in the interpretation shelter at the Hokitika Gorge Track.

Franz Josef Waiau area

The Three mile track extension complete with a new 110 metre long boardwalk has reached the stage of practical completion. The track now uses both unformed legal roads and public conservation land to re join the Three Mile track about 200 metres from the old track end. There is sign replacement, top coursing and wheel stops installation to complete the carpark which we were reluctant to do until the track construction was complete.

Like other West Coast areas, we also suffered from heavy rain through late December and early January, to a lesser extent though. Access has been limited to the end of the Forest walk on 7 separate days since the week before Christmas. This has resulted in several minor maintenance issues being dealt with at the wash away boardwalk sites on the Waiho

riverbed. Most of the remaining time has seen people getting within 60 and 100 metres of the terminal face.

A new interpretation system is now in place in the valley to assist with our safety messages.

Windfalls have been cleared from much of the Perth valley with approximately 300 metres of track requiring re-routing following storm damage.

Visitor numbers in the Franz Josef valley for the 2010 calendar year ended up at 415,000 which is within 2000 less than the numbers for both 2008 and 2009. There have been a few busy days since New Year. However, overall the Valley doesn't seem to be consistently busy.

Routine inspection and maintenance work has been carried out on many of the day use tracks over the last two months. However, we are a little behind with that work due to storm damage work.

South Westland Weheka Area

The past month has been largely focused on managing the Fox Glacier Valley. Heavy rain in late December and early January caused the Fox River to shift to the true right and the track to the terminal face viewpoint has been washed out. Currently the track is only open to the carpark. Planning is currently underway to re-establish the track so that it can be re-opened to the terminal face viewpoint. It is expected, assuming river levels have dropped sufficiently, that work will begin during the week of the 17 of January to endeavour to redirect the flow away from the true right (and the causeway).

Once the works are completed, department staff will then work to re-establish the track. Environmental factors may determine the timeframe for completion of the works. The Department appreciates the need to have walking access opened as soon as possible and are planning as proactively as we can.

Staff are currently finalising details for the formation of the Fox Glacier Access Stakeholders Group, which consists of representatives from the local community and the Department. The first meeting is likely to be held in late January. The purpose of the group will essentially be to improve communication between the Department and the members of the Fox community who have a key interest in glacier access conditions in the valley.

In addition to this work in the valley, new glacier safety and information signs have been installed at the Glacier Carpark, the Yellow Creek Viewpoint and the Terminal Face Viewpoint. The major upgrade of the Splash Ford has also been completed, which involved the installation of a new boxed culvert, to allow all weather crossings to the Glacier Carpark.

In regard to work on hut and track maintenance there has been a continuation of the work on the Copland track by Architect Creek Bridge and some maintenance on Monro Beach boardwalk, the Knights Point carpark and Stafford hut.

Visitor Centres

Visitor Centre	Total Number Visitors from 1 July 10 to 31 December 10	% Increase or decrease for same period last year
Punakaiki	67337	-8.74%
Reefton	24431	0.7% decrease
Franz Josef	46261	-9.9%
Haast	34 884	11.9% decrease

Community Involvement/Initiatives

Buller Kawatiri Area

The Buller Conservation Volunteers have had five volunteer days and completed a variety of conservation initiatives including: historic work at Denniston (two separate days); bird surveys for the National Wader Count at Orowaiti and Okari Estuaries; clean up of Mississippi Creek and track maintenance at Charleston.

Two classes of Buller High School Students spent a day planting flaxes and trees at Tauranga Bay. Each class also completed a worksheet with help from the ranger who gave a talk on the importance of the regeneration work being done by the school over the last 15 years.

A talk was given to the Karamea Area School year five and six students on the importance of healthy waterways. The students then went to a local stream where they were shown how to look at stream health using the Whitebait Connection activities.

A tree planting and a talk on the importance of conservation was held with Sue Thomson Casey Memorial Library summer reading programme children. A DOC ranger has been asked to hand out prizes at the Sue Thomson Casey Memorial Library party celebrating the end of their summer reading programme.

A Tai Poutini Polytechnic student is doing work experience with DOC three days a week assisting with work at Denniston.

Tours of Denniston are being held with Tourism West Coast, Jim Eagles (travel writer) and TV3 among others.

A book reading has been organised for the end of January at the Sue Thomson Casey Memorial Library. The well known author Jenny Patrick, “The Denniston Rose” and “Heart of Coal”, will be reading selections of her famous books and talking about her life as an author.

The ‘Chaingrinder’ mountain bike race has been organised and will be held at Denniston at the end of January. \$5,000 worth of prizes will be handed out on the day including spot prizes.

Hokitika Area

WestREAP invited DOC to support their Gifted and Talented programme (GATE) as they gave children from Greymouth and Hokitika schools, the opportunity to discover freshwater invertebrates, gold mining history and fossicking at Goldsborough over two very successful days towards the end of term.

The Hokitika Scouts invited the CR Ranger to talk to their Kea group about native birds and the children listened to bird sounds, viewed pictures and told their own bird stories.

As part of the year end activities for younger Westland High School students, teachers suggested that they might be able to work with DOC. Two groups did a big tidy up around the Māhinapua tracks including access roads and the Hokitika beach. The first group were surprised and pleased that they could recycle almost all the waste they found and the beach group concluded their day with a sculpture competition. DOC staff were given the honour of judging, which provided the opportunity for an impromptu discussion about local marine life and the problems caused by our waste.

With the Mt Brown Hut community project complete, Ian McClure and Paul Davidson attended an evening to celebrate the achievement, which was also recognised at the Westland TrustPower Community Awards.

Franz Josef Waiiau Area

About 15 community members attended an 'open day' on 16 December to introduce them to the new walking track along Neil's Creek, within the newly acquired Waiho Forest Scenic Reserve. Ages ranged from 4 ½ to over 70, and the walk to the beach was followed by a barbeque at the beginning of the walking track.

A planting day at La Fontaine Stream was organised by Jim Costello of South Westland Area School on 9 December– the first for a few years. The plants were provided by the community relations team and the school has been encouraged to get assistance from DOC in growing locally sourced plants from seed.

The Kiwi Ranger booklets have been launched in Franz Josef, to an enthusiastic response from the community. The medical clinic and one of the tourism operators have expressed interest in having copies of the booklet to give out to kids, especially on rainy days.

South Westland Weheka Area

Our community relations staff have been working on the 2011 Haast Summer Programme. The Programme will run from 17 January to 9 February, with special guests including 'The Bug Man', Ruud Kleinpaste. The aim of the programme is to show participants what the Department does in the area and to pique their interest in conservation. The events scheduled in the programme include; flights into the Haast Tokoeka Kiwi Sanctuary, several movie nights at the Haast Visitor Centre, a jet boat ride with Waiatoto River Safaris, presentations from marine expert Don Neale, guided walks around Hapuka Estuary and along the Swamp Forest and Dune walks at Ship Creek. There is also going to be a boat trip around Jackson Bay, a guided walk on the Historic Haast – Paringa Cattle track to Blow Fly Hut and a walk around the Haast Tokoeka Kiwi Sanctuary following kiwi dog Tussock as he tries to find a kiwi.

Ruud Kleinpaste will be involved in three events, in addition to a visit to the Haast School. Ruud will be giving a presentation a guided tour of Hapuka Estuary and leading a walk in the Haast Tokoeka Kiwi Sanctuary.

Programme information is available at: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/getting-involved/events-and-awards/regional-events/west-coast/haast-summer-programme/>

Biodiversity asset staff have also been spreading the word about what the Department is doing, by contributing to the Departments conservation blog. Staff have most recently been blogging about the translocation of Haast Tokoeka Kiwi chicks from the kiwi Sanctuary in Haast, to the Orokonui Eco-Sanctuary. The blog is available at <http://blog.doc.govt.nz/>

Wild Creations Artist in Residence, Chris Cottrell has finished his placement at Fox Glacier. To showcase his work, Chris gave a presentation to the community with the support of the South Westland Area Office staff. Chris was very well received in the community where he worked with the school on a number of occasions, teaching the kids how to draw using GPS devices. His final product was an interactive map of Fox Glacier combining the visual, audio and physical aspects of the valley.

Historic

Buller Area

All resources have been focussed on getting the Historic Banbury mine ready to accept the installation of a world class interpretation experience. Staff and contractors have moved

underground the various pieces of equipment, including a very large, heavy and awkward piece of glass for the peppers ghost.

Staff have continued to place the final touches on the railway component that runs underground. Staff have also had to deal with water and drainage issues and test run the railway locomotive.

Greymouth Mawheranui Area

November saw the Lord Brassey Stamper battery pelton wheel frame rebuild completed, proposed drill sites at Big River inspected and a meeting with the West Coast Regional Council on contaminated sites at Waiuta. This was followed by a great day out with the Board explaining weed control, work completed and proposed on historic sites and discussed contaminated sites issues at Waiuta and inspecting the Oceana Gold drill site.

We talked to a group of school children at Goldsbrough, completed the inspection of the proposed Nelson Creek water supply and started the Alborns Base Line Inspection.

All historic sites have now been shifted into the AMIS programme.

South Westland Weheka Area

Staff have installed new interpretation panels at Lake Matheson. The panels were a joint venture between the Department and the owner of the Lake Matheson Café. They depict the social and geographical history of the land surrounding the lake.

Species Management

Little Blue Penguin

Franz Josef Waiiau Area

Colonies are monitored weekly at North Okarito and South Okarito and fortnightly at Wanganui Beach. Of the 61 eggs laid at North Okarito, 37 chicks fledged from 38 hatched eggs. At South Okarito, 27 eggs were laid and 13 chicks fledged from 16 hatched eggs. Seventeen eggs were laid at Wanganui and 10 fledged chicks resulted from 13 hatched eggs.

Haast Tokoeka:

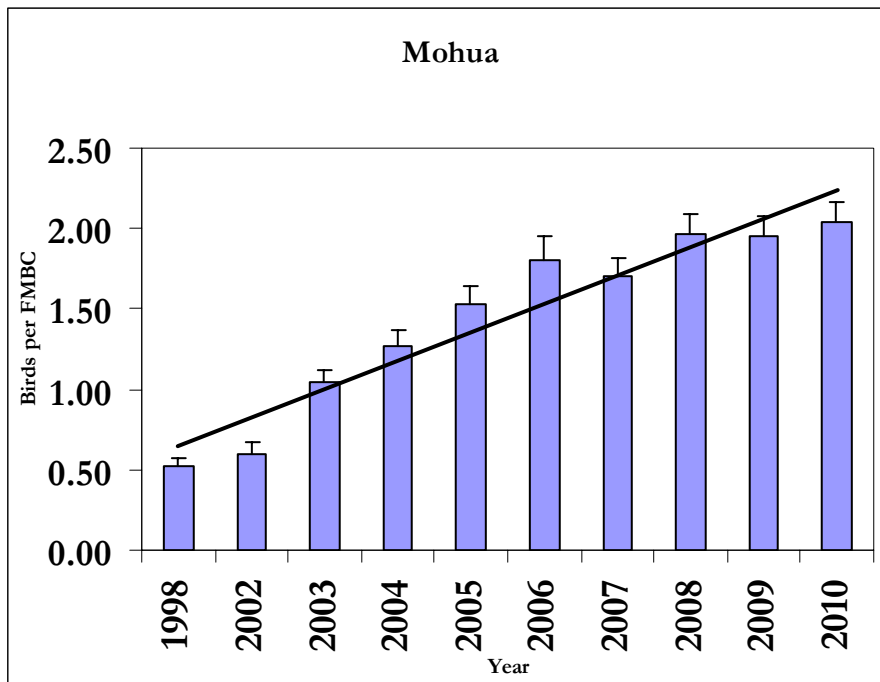
December proved very busy in the Sanctuary and crèche islands. Nine chicks were released from Willowbank onto Rona Island. Two eggs and one chick were rescued from the Sanctuary and the kiwi team also carried out some invertebrate sampling on an island off Bluff to determine its suitability as a crèche site for kiwi.

Six kiwi were transferred to Coal Island as part of ongoing work to establish an insurance population.

Mohua (Landsborough):

A trap check trip was carried out at the start of December. Both the stoat and rat catch was very low with three of each in the traps. The team completed the trapline upgrade, swapping all the old style fenn traps to DOC150 and 200s traps, which are rated to kill stoats and rats more humanely.

Data from the November five minute bird counts was fully compiled and on final analysis the mohua numbers have increased from 328 at 168 stations to 357. This continues the upward trend of the Landsborough mohua population since predator control was established in 2000. The mohua count in 1998 was 93 at 177 stations, which equalled 0.53 mohua per station.



Great Spotted Kiwi (Roroa):

Greymouth Mawheranui Area

To date a total of eight eggs have been taken to Willow Bank for incubation. Of the eight eggs, seven were successful and one failed. Currently there is only one chick at Willow Bank and six chicks in the crèche at Atarau. Four Roroa have been successfully released from the crèche back into the Paparoas off Roa Road.

There are currently still six monitored eggs in the Paparoas with the possibility of another two being sent to Willow Bank.

There have been five night surveys carried out at various points in the Paparoa ranges to determine/identify Roroa territories; this work was undertaken in preparation for the release of juvenile birds.

Buller Kawatiri Area

Call-count monitoring in the Upper Waimangaroa-Orikaka River area has been completed. Analysis of the results has yet to be completed.

As part of a Bay of Plenty polytechnic course, volunteers surveyed a central part of the Oparara basin was completed in November. The results indicate a healthy population of up to 40 pairs.

Rowi

77 incubation attempts have been detected by the fixed-wing airplane mounted 'Sky Ranger' receiver. 52 eggs have been rescued. To date, a net total of 27 chicks and five fertile eggs have survived. Two wild chicks have been rescued. 20 chicks are currently at Willowbank Wildlife Reserve. Six chicks are at West Coast Wildlife Centre, four of which are housed in the nocturnal house for public viewing. One chick is on Motuara Island. The five fertile eggs are at West Coast Wildlife Centre. Five chicks from the initial release on Motuara Island succumbed to falcon predation. Chicks will be held in a crèche at Willowbank Wildlife Reserve until they are around two months old. This will enable development of their nocturnal instinct and make them less susceptible to "day-walking" and falcon predation.

Whio/Blue Duck

Buller Kawatiri Area

None of the monitored breeding whio pairs in the Oparara had laid eggs by mid-October, which was disappointing. In November, adults with ducklings were observed on the Oparara River but just prior to the new year both the Oparara and Ugly had huge floods through them and it is probable that this will have a significant negative effect on how many ducklings make it through to the fledging stage. Stoat catches on both rivers have been low.

Hokitika and Greymouth Mawheranui Areas

Eight whio eggs from three nests were transferred to Peacock Springs for captive rearing by Greymouth and Hokitika staff. Two of these Whio are now ready to come back for release in the Moonlight River. The remaining six will be ready for release some time around March. There are still two Whio with transmitters attached in the Mikonui River, it is expected that these will be removed within the next fortnight.

Threatened plants

Charleston Gentian

Things are looking good with a total of 134 flowering plants recorded during a recent survey. 87 were within the natural range (at Charleston), with another 47 plants at translocation sites at Tauranga Bay-Cape Foulwind. Many non-flowering plants and good seedling numbers were also observed.

***Powelliphanta* species**

P. millertoni

As expected, over the summer the rat catches have been on the increase so the monthly trap checks have been increased to fortnightly checks.

P. augusta

The captive snail population is increasing slowly with the Hokitika captive facility currently housing 1,610 snails and 791 eggs.

Over the spring and early summer period the captive population has produced over 500 eggs. This is more than three times what has been recorded from the same period in previous years and can largely be attributed to the breeding trials and subsequent changes to the husbandry regime. Both the breeding and survival trials are continuing.

The second year's mark-recapture monitoring at the Stockton and Mount Rochfort snail translocation sites is programmed for later this summer. This will give early indication of population trends at each site, though at least three or more years monitoring data is necessary before population trends can be modelled with any confidence.

Freshwater Fish

169 mudfish were shifted from a mining site at Callaghans and released at two nearby sites in an attempt to save their lives. A follow-up check six weeks later found only six fish, indicating poor survival of those fish that were shifted.

Animal Pest Control

Buller Kawatiri Area

Ground Control for goats has been completed in the South Mokihinui, with regular consultation with neighbouring Nelson Conservancy and Solid Energy Contractors (Animal Control) working up to and around the North Branch Mokihinui. Efforts are ongoing – overall populations are now reducing.

Staff have begun visiting landowners in preparation for possum control in the coastal forest block between the Punakaiki and Fox Rivers.

Greymouth Mawheranui Area

Ground and aerial work for goat control are underway, efforts will move to Maruia West and Lewis Pass in February – March.

The Henry trap trial is ongoing with the new bait system due to be release shortly.

Hokitika Area

Ground and aerial work for goat control are underway. Judas Tahr control is planned for February – March.

Franz Josef Waiau Area

Tahr control was undertaken in Poerua, Callery and Waikukupa. A total of 311 animals were observed, of which 175 were culled.

Aerial tahr control has been planned for the Whataroa, Poerua, Callery and Omoeroa catchments in February – March; this had been delayed due to assistance at Pike River Mine. This control work is expected to be completed shortly.

South Westland Weheka Area

The Whakapohai, Mataketake, and Moeraki aerial possum control was executed, with pre-feed laid on 23 November followed by the toxic on 1 December 2010. Results have since come in from the May 2010 Cascade aerial possum control operation with zero possums caught during the monitoring.

Further possum control has been carried out with routine checks of both the Mistletoe and Fox valley kill trap lines, where eight and six possums were caught respectively. Staff have also begun planning for the next aerial possum operation in the Haast valley on the true right, up to and including the Clarke Valley.

Tahr control was also carried out in the Clarke, Landsborough, Fox, Callery, Karangarua, Douglas and Copland valleys with a total of 567 Tahr culled.

Weed Pest Control

Buller Kawatiri Area

Heaphy valley gorse control has been completed, as has the aerial spraying of *gunnera* growing on the Omau coastal cliffs. Little Wanganui Parrot's Feather control has begun.

Greymouth Mawheranui Area

All weed control on DOC managed land in the Maruia Valley has been completed. We are currently working on the LINZ land in the Maruia Valley.

Waiuta weed control has been completed for the season.

Ginger control around Greymouth is currently underway.

Hokitika Area

Weed operations continued on a number of fronts: Taramakau, Otehake, Otira and Rolleston Valleys (gorse & broom), Camelback, Doughboy, Old Christchurch Rd and Kakapotahi (spiraea), Mahinapua Creek (willow) and Lake Mahinapua (water lily).

Franz Josef Waiiau Area

The primary weed control operations over recent months have been Docherty Creek buddleia and Lake Wahapo willow. Control of gorse re-growth has been undertaken at select sites in North Okarito and Saltwater Forest. Tradescantia infestations at Okarito township and Okarito Lagoon were controlled pre-Christmas. Annual control of multi-species weeds at Whataroa and Harihari is ongoing.

South Westland Weheka Area

Staff have recently completed aerial weed control between the Fox and Haast rivers. This operation was in conjunction with local farmers as a continuation from previous years efforts. The operation will be followed up with ground operations over time.

Fire

One of the three National Rural Fire Authorities, National Incident Management Teams was deployed to assist Police with Incident Management for the Pike River Mine response; this team utilised the Greymouth Area office as their base of operation for six days. (One of the Greymouth Area staff is a member of this team). There has been ongoing commitment to assist the Police with the operation with staff rostered from all over the Conservancy; this work will have an impact on the scheduled work programme.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board notes the information in this report.

Mike Slater
Conservator